



## Testimony in support of HB 479-Increasing Access to Healthy School Meals

February 16, 2007

"Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, my name is Katie Bark and I am from Bozeman. I am here on behalf of the Montana School Nutrition Association. I am a member of this organization, which represents over 200 food service professionals from across Montana. I am here as a proponent of HB 479.

The bill is needed to support schools in serving high quality meals. As Representative Raser demonstrated earlier, the need for equipment in school food service programs expands across the state and the needs range from small to large. For example, Thompson Falls recently had a bake sale to buy a frying pan for the program. Winifred School would like to purchase a salad bar to increase their choices of fresh fruits and vegetables offered to students. The availability of adequate food service equipment is directly related to the school's ability to prepare healthy meals and maintain good participation to help ensure a balanced budget. For example, Helena's food service program just purchased a new convection oven and salad bar for Helena High School and as a result, they have seen a significant increase in both their breakfast and lunch participation levels. Lunch doubled it sales of school meals and the number of school breakfasts increased by three-fold. The new equipment helped serve the kids expanded choices and provide faster service which helped increase their satisfaction in the program resulting in better participation and thus revenues in the program.

This bill may also support schools in offering nutritious breakfasts to children so they are ready to learn. Regardless if you agree or not in school breakfast programs, school nutrition professionals see first hand that many children come to school without having breakfast. Kids need to food to think, behave and obtain better test scores. Breakfast eaters are also more likely to have a healthy weight and not be overweight or at risk for obesity.

From an economic standpoint, schools play an important role in supporting the procurement of local foods and equipment from local vendors. There is a growing interest in Farm to School Programs and school nutrition professionals are excited about the increased opportunity to purchase foods from Montana farmers and ranchers. For example, Becky Green from Malta Schools was able to purchase melons from a local farmer for school lunches last fall. The melons were fresh, delicious, affordable, and enjoyed by all.

The concerns I am sharing with you today represent the concerns and needs of food service programs across the state. Basic needs in school food services to carry out their work are a hidden and largely unrecognized problem. School nutrition programs are vital to supporting our children's education and deserve your support.

*Respectfully submitted from Katie Bark, Registered Dietitian, 406-570-5980, [barksnmt@imt.net](mailto:barksnmt@imt.net)  
Contact Carol Simanton, President of Montana School Nutrition Association, 406-674-5460 or  
visit [www.mtsfsa.org](http://www.mtsfsa.org)*